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THE « CONTE DEL BRAIT »
AND THE HISPANIC « DEMANDA DEL SANCTO GRIAL »

Et je prie a mon signeur Helye, qui esté mes copains ... que il pour l'amour de moi et pour moi un poi allegier de cele grant painne prenge a translater, ensi comme je le deviserai, une petite branke qui appartient a mon livre, et sera celle branke apielee li *Contes del Brait*¹.

The *Conte del Brait* is a fictitious work: this has been shown by Fanni Bogdanow², on the basis of Ferdinand Lot's statement that a redactor of a prose romance would refer to an imaginary branch for the adventures that he did not wish to relate. These references allowed subsequent *remanieurs* to take up some of these allusions and elaborate upon them³. In the same article, Bogdanow demonstrates that the author of the Hispanic *Baladro del sabio Merlin* has elaborated upon certain references to the *Conte del Brait* that appear in his French Post-Vulgate source when he relates the adventures of Baudemagus at the time of Merlin's entombment. In so doing, the author of the *Baladro* omits the name of the *Conte del Brait* in these places as superfluous, an action which caused some scholars to conclude that the Hispanic *Baladro* was, at least in part, a translation of the *Conte del Brait*.

In a chapter on the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin*, Bogdanow repeats her affirmation of the imaginary nature of the *Conte del Brait* and stresses her view by saying that there are references to the *Conte del Brait* in the Hispanic *Demanda del Sancto Grial*

¹ *Merlin*, Roman en prose du XIII^e siècle, publié avec la mise en prose du poème de Merlin de Robert de Boron, d'après le manuscrit appartenant à M. Alfred Huth, ed. G. Paris and J. Ulrich, 2 vols. (Paris: SATF, 1886), vol. ii, pp. 57-58.

² *The Spanish Baladro and the Conte du Brait*, « Rom. », LXXXIII, 1962, 383-99.

³ Bogdanow, *The Spanish Baladro*, p. 389, and *The Romance of the Grail* (Manchester, 1966), p. 52; Ferdinand Lot, *Étude sur le Lancelot en prose* (Paris, 1918), p. 13.

which allude to events that are not related in any other text⁴. This, she argues, is absurd because "the hypothetical *Brait* terminated with Merlin's death". Therefore, the *Conte del Brait* can only have been a figment of the imagination, employed as an excuse for not narrating certain events.

It may be useful at this stage to list the distribution of references to the *Brait* (called the "Cuento del Baladro" or the "Romanoço do Braado") in the Hispanic texts:

a) twice in the Spanish *Demanda*⁵, chapter XXXVI (section 39 in the Portuguese *Demanda*⁶) — the adventures of the Knight of the Saya mal Tallada and of Guigaar, the son of Galvan⁷;

b) once in the Spanish *Demanda*, chapter CCCLV (compared to twice in sections 580 and 581 of the Portuguese version) — the adventures of Galahad;

c) three times in chapter CCCLVIII of the Spanish text (sections 585, 587 and 594 of the Portuguese) — the adventures of the three Grail companions, the life and prowess of Melegas de la Marcha and the adventures of the other knights who achieved the Grail Quest;

d) once in the Spanish *Demanda*, chapter CCCLXXIII (not in the Portuguese because the Spanish version uses a different version of the Grail episode) — the adventures of Galahad, Perceval and Boores;

e) once in chapter CCCCXXIII of the Spanish (section 664 of the Portuguese *Demanda*) — the battles between the lineages of King Arthur and King Ban in the *Mort Artu*;

⁴ 'The *Suite du Merlin* and the Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal*', chapter 24 of *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, A Collaborative History*, ed. R. S. Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 325-35, at p. 328.

⁵ *La demanda do Santo Grial*, in *Libros de caballerías*, ed. A. Bonilla y San Martín, vol. i, NBAE, VI (Madrid, 1907).

⁶ *A demanda do Santo Graal*, ed. Augusto Magne, 3 vols., Dicionário medieval e clássico da língua portuguesa, Anexos 1 (Rio de Janeiro, 1944). I use the 1944 edition of this work because Magne's second edition is still in progress; the first volume appeared in 1955.

⁷ On this occasion, Sp. *Demanda* replaces *Baladro* with «Bastardo», a title I have found nowhere else in the prose romances; it could refer to Yvan el Bastardo, but I doubt it since the Portuguese equivalent has «Conto do Brado» here. On p. 175, n. 1, of his edition, Bonilla says of «Bastardo»: «Algún otro libro de caballerías. Probablemente *Yvain* o *Iwein*, el *Chavalier au lion*. Este segundo título es el del poema de Chrétien de Troyes (siglo XII); el primero, el de la traducción alemana de Hartmann von Aue». I would suggest that, rather than there being a link between the Spanish version and Chrétien, the Spanish author has replaced *Baladro* with «Bastardo» either in error or deliberately.

f) twice in chapter CCCCXXIV of the Spanish (section 665 of the Portuguese) — the names of the seven kings and seven companions of the Round Table killed in the last battle on Salisbury Plain;

g) once in chapter CCCCXXVI of the Spanish *Demanda* (section 671 of its Portuguese equivalent) — how the “capilla vera” got its name.

In *The Spanish Baladro* Bogdanow gives a list of the adventures that were supposed to have comprised the *Conte del Brait*, culled from the references to that work. The book, she says, “was essentially the story of Merlin’s last cry (*brait*) which he uttered when he realized that he had been entombed by the woman he loved” (p. 385). But if we consider Bogdanow’s list of the contents, we shall see that the *Conte del Brait* was thought to be much more than a story of Merlin’s death and final yell. The adventures that are said to be in the *Conte del Brait* are referred to in:

a) the Post-Vulgate *Queste* and *Mort Artu*, how Galahad healed King Mordrain (which is not mentioned in either the Spanish or Portuguese *Demanda* texts, but is in MS B.N. fr. 343, fol. 98b); the adventures of Galahad that are omitted to keep the branches of the trilogy equal in length (MS B.N. fr. 343, the Portuguese *Demanda*, section 581 and the Spanish version, chapter CCCLV); the battles between the lineages of King Arthur and King Ban (see above); in the *Mort Artu*, the statement that the *Conte del Brait* and the *Tristan* are separate works (MS B.N. fr. 340, fol. 207b-c, not in the Spanish or Portuguese *Demanda* texts);

b) the *Folie Lancelot*⁸, MS B.N. fr. 112, fol. 251a, Lancelot’s madness;

c) *Die Abenteuer...*⁹, how Gahariet swore never to reveal his prowess and how he untied Baudemagus from a tree;

d) the *Huth Merlin*¹⁰, vol. ii, pp. 197-98, the prophecy of the opening of Merlin’s tomb (the Hispanic *Baladro* does not mention the *Brait* at this point) and Huth, ii, pp. 172-73, Baudemagus’ adventures

⁸ *La Folie Lancelot, a hitherto unidentified portion of the Suite du Merlin contained in Mss. B. N. fr. 112 and 12599*, edited by Fanni Bogdanow, Beihefte zur « Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie », CIX (1965).

⁹ *Die Abenteuer Gawains, Ywains und Le Morholts mit den drei Jungfrauen aus der Trilogie (Demanda) des Pseudo-Robert de Borron. Die Fortsetzung des Huth-Merlin*, edited by H. Oskar Sommer, Beihefte zur « Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie », XLVII (1913).

¹⁰ For full reference, see n. 1 above.

after leaving King Arthur's court, which are related in full in the Hispanic *Baladro* texts.

In her article, Bogdanow has provided an almost comprehensive survey of the supposed contents of the *Conte del Brait* and one can at least see that the *Brait* covered a wide area of Arthurian material. But in the *Romance of the Grail*, Bogdanow transcribes a portion of the Post-Vulgate *Queste* which includes three further references to the *Conte del Brait* on which she does not comment¹¹. From these references that are found in the Hispanic *Demandas* we can add seven episodes to those listed by Bogdanow in *The Spanish Baladro*; all should be inserted in the *Queste/Mort Artu* section of the Post-Vulgate. (The three allusions in Bogdanow's transcription can be found translated in the Spanish and Portuguese versions, numbers 2, 3 and 4 below).

1. The adventures of the Knight of the Saya mal Tallada and of Guigaar:

Sp. *Demanda*, chapter XXXVI: el donzel de la saya mal tajada, de que el *Cuento del bastardo* fabla mucho; ... Grongan el fijo de Galuan, de que el *Cuento del bastardo* habla.

Port. *Demanda*, section 39: o donzel da saia mal-talhada, de que o conto do brado fala muito; ... Guigaar o filho de Galuan de que o conto do brado falla¹².

2. The adventures of the three companions, Galahad, Percival and Boores:

¹¹ Bogdanow, *Romance of the Grail*, Appendix II, pp. 250-61: 'The final scene at Corbenic', from MS. B.N. fr. 343, fol. 102a-104c: the three relevant quotations are: (for No. 2 in the list I provide below, pp. 4-5) «Après ce chevauchierent ensamble tuit troi grant tens et trouverent plusors aventures dont cil de Beron ne raconte riens. Mes li Braiz le devise» (p. 251). (For No. 3) «Mes qui les prouesses de lui [Melians de Danemarche] vouldra apertement savoir, si voie le Brait, car iluec devise messire Helies» (p. 252). (For No. 4) «Des autres(uit) qui vouldra oir coment il morurent et qu'il trouverent, si preigne l'estoire del Brait, car messire Helies le devise iluec tout apertement» (p. 261).

¹² In his 1944 edition, Magne does not reproduce the whole of folio 13a, so I have supplied the second part of this reference from the facsimile of this folio that he gives on p. 423 of vol. i.

Sp. *Demanda*, chapter CCCLVIII: e anduuieron mucho de so vno, e fallaron muchas auenturas que dieron cima, de que aqui no cuenta mas; quien las quisiere saber tome el libro del *Baladro*.

Port. *Demanda*, section 585: Depois andarom de-suu todos III e acharom muitas auenturas que nom conto aqui a *estória*, mas no romanço do Braado as acharedes.

3. The life and prowess of Melegas de la Marcha:

Sp. *Demanda*, chapter CCCLVIII: el .v. Melegas de la Marcha, a quien Galaz fizo cauallero, e de las sus buenas cauallerias no vos conte aqui, por el libro que se fizo grande, mas quien las quisiere saber, tome el libro del *Baladro*, que ay las fallara.

Port. *Demanda*, section 587: e outro era Meliante de *Dinamarca*, que fezera Galaaz caualeiro en comêço de sa cavaleria. E se vos nom falei en esta *estória* de Meliante, nom me ponhades culpa, ca o leixei nom por nom fazer êle muitas boas cavalerias en esta demanda, ante o leixo por meu livro nom seer grande sobejo; mas quem as bondades *dêle* quiser saber, no Romanço do Braado as achará.

4. The adventures of the other knights who saw the Grail:

Sp. *Demanda*, chapter CCCLVIII: Agora no dize aqui de las auenturas que los otros passaron y como les fue; que todo esta en el libro del *Baladro*.

Port. *Demanda*, section 594: Dos outros oito, quen ovir quesar como lhis aveo, vaa ao conto do Braado.

5. The adventures of the three companions in the Spanish text only, which is a repetition of No. 2 above, since the Spanish version follows a different version of the achievement of the quest from its Portuguese and French equivalents¹³:

Sp. *Demanda*, chapter CCCLXXIII: E assi anduuieron todos tres en vno gran tienpo, e fallaron muchas auenturas a que dieron cima; y son en el libro del *Baladro* escritas.

¹³ See H. Oskar Sommer, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, « Rom. », XXXVI, 1907, 369-462 and 543-90, at p. 584.

6. The names of the seven kings and seven companions of the Round Table killed by Mordred in the last battle on Salisbury Plain:

Sp. *Demanda*, chapter CCCCXXIV: Y en aquella batalla fueron muertos siete reyes. Y en el libro del *Baladro* dira quales; ... E sabed que dize la historia que en toda su vida [Mordred] no fizo tanto como aquel dia solo, ca dize que el mato siete compañeros de la Tabla Redonda, que el libro del *Baladro* dize sus nombres.

Port. *Demanda*, section 665: E naquela batalha foram mortos VII reis da parte de rei Artur, e o conto do Braado diz quaes foram... E sabede que a estoria diz que en toda su vida nom fez tanto en armas como aquel dia soo, ca el por sas maos matou .VI. companheiros da Tavola Redonda, de que o conto do Braado conta os nomes e os feitos.

7. How the "capilla vera" got its name:

Sp. *Demanda*, chapter CCCCXXVI: E auia nonbre la capilla vera, mas de la manera que vuo este nonbre el libro del *Baladro* lo deuisa, que mas faze a su cuento que a este.

Port. *Demanda*, section 671: E aquela capela avia nome « a Capela Veira ». Mas onde ouue este nome o Romanço do Braado o devisara ca mais fez a seu conto ca este¹⁴.

From these seven references, plus those listed by Bogdanow, it can be seen that, save Baudemagus' adventures after leaving the court, all the episodes take place after the entombment of Merlin. If Bogdanow is correct in assuming that the supposed *Conte del Brait* concentrated on the magician's last cry and death, then all the references to the work in *Die Abenteuer...*, the *Folie Lancelot* and the *Queste/Mort Artu* are pointless since they occur after Merlin's death. It would therefore be more accurate to say that the *Conte del Brait*, being a hypothetical book and purely a narrative device designed to prevent the story from becoming too long, has no set boundaries or limitations of content.

¹⁴ Although Sommer notes all except No. 1 of these references (*The Quest of the Holy Grail*, pp. 572-86), he regards the *Conte del Brait* as a real book (« I hope soon to be able to find the complete *Conte del Brait...* », p. 399) and therefore does not place these allusions in their correct perspective, i.e. as notes for possible future elaboration.

The seven references to episodes in the *Conte del Brait* which I have enumerated are not connected in any way and, except for the adventures of the three companions which take place on the quest and the names of the seven kings and knights killed on Salisbury Plain, have no hint as to when in the Grail cycle the events referred to should take place. But those episodes noted by Bogdanow are all set in context within the narrative: with the exception of the prophecy of Merlin's release, they relate to specific adventures which form the next part of the story, but which are not vital elements in the structure of the plot. For example, Galahad's adventures are omitted because they would make the story too long; Lancelot's madness is not related because the Post-Vulgate did not deal with the affair between Lancelot and Queen Guenevere. These references could be elaborated upon in the position in which they occur in the text, which happened in the Hispanic *Baladro* with the full account of Baudemagus' adventures. But since the seven extra references to the *Conte del Brait* in the *Demanda* are not specific, alluding neither to events that are to follow immediately¹⁵, nor to a definite situation in the preceding narrative of the cycle, the Hispanic author has not elaborated upon them as he did with the references to the *Conte del Brait* which appeared in the French predecessor to the *Baladro del sabio Merlin* at the point of narration of Baudemagus' adventures at the time of the death of Merlin.

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¹⁵ The only exceptions are No. 2 (and No. 5 in the Spanish), the adventures of the three companions, and No. 6, the names of the slain kings and knights in the last battle, which should be related where the references to the *Brait* occur in the text.